

Budget Update (May 26, 2010)

On May 14, the governor released his “May revise,” a revision to his January budget proposal. The good news for K-12 public schools is that he has not proposed any new cuts since his January proposal. However, his revision does include some indirect threats to school finance that may affect us as the state’s budget deliberations evolve in the coming month(s).

Specifically, the governor proposes to bridge the state’s budget gap by eliminating CalWorks (the state’s welfare program), suspending mental health funding for students, and making deep cuts to other health and human services. Because many of these proposals are not likely to be acceptable to the legislature, public education may still be dragged into talks about further reductions.

We were also disappointed to learn that some earlier projections about the base funding for schools were clarified by the Department of Finance and will reduce the funds coming to the FCUSD by another \$836,000. This additional reduction will have to be folded into our final budget.

Tentative Agreement with the Folsom Cordova Education Association

The Folsom Cordova Education Association (FCEA) will vote on an agreement to reduce the work year by three days for the 2010-11 school year this week. We should know the results of that vote on Friday, May 28. FCEA represents the teachers, counselors, nurses, psychologists, and other certificated support staff that serve our students.

This agreement would generate \$1.1 million dollars that can be used to restore positions and maintain services for students. The three day work year reduction is equivalent to a salary reduction of 1.63%.

The consensus of the Governing Board has been that the first priority for restoring positions would be to reinstate our middle school electives. The \$1.1 million tentative agreement does not fully cover the \$1.3 million needed to employ all of the teachers for the middle school elective program, but the District does plan to offer middle school electives if the agreement is approved by the Governing Board at its June 3 meeting.

The tentative agreement also includes several other contract language clarifications related to class size, involuntary transfers, and the administration of benchmark tests. (See Tentative Agreement with FCEA for details.)

The District’s Proposal to FCEA

At the bargaining session on Friday, May 7, the District proposed a six day work year reduction that would have restored more positions and services for students. The District also proposed a three day work year reduction and freezing the step and column salary increases most teachers receive for an additional year of experience and/or for completing 15 units of additional training.

Either of these agreements would have restored the middle school electives, five high school elective teachers, three high school counselors, one nurse, and at least six elementary teachers to lessen an increase in class size in the 1st and 2nd grades. (See District’s proposal for details.)

The six day work year reduction is equivalent to a 3.26% salary decrease. A three day work year reduction and freezing the automatic step and column increase would yield a 3.1% decrease. Many

districts in the state have been able to negotiate work year reductions, salary reductions, and/or freezes to automatic step and salary increases greater than the agreement between the District and FCEA.

The union leadership was very firm in stating that its membership would not support more than a three day work year reduction for 2010-11 and would not consider a freeze on step and column increases.

Status of Bargaining with the California School Employees Association (CSEA)

The District and CSEA, the association that represents classified employees such as office staff, bus drivers, custodians, and instructional aides, are continuing to meet. To date, we do not have a tentative agreement, but we are hopeful that we can mutually develop a proposal to save some of the jobs and services provided by CSEA members.

Voluntary Work Year Reduction for Administrators and Supervisors

In December, the administrators and supervisors employed by the District voluntarily agreed to a six day work year reduction and corresponding salary reduction.

State Budget Stalemate

The known reductions and the potential additional reductions for funding for schools are compounded by the lack of progress on adopting a final state budget. Most political observers believe that the legislature is not likely to take any action until after the June 3 primary elections.

Additionally, Assembly Speaker Perez has made it clear that he will place health and human services ahead of public schools in the priority for any additional funding that might be available.

Adding to our concerns about the level of state funding is the fact that the state's fiscal team has proved to be adept at capturing federal dollars intended for public schools. The FCUSD was slated to receive \$801,519 in federal State Fiscal Stabilization Funds (SFSF). Shortly before notice of the amount we were to receive, the state informed us that it would be "redirecting" some of the state categorical dollars due to school districts to pay for the Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA), a special program that serves low-performing schools. The state informed school districts that they must use the SFSF funds to offset the loss of the categorical dollars.

I suppose I could be accused of being cynical in noting that the \$801,519 SFSF funds was the same amount (to the dollar) the District lost due to the shift of our state categorical funds to QEIA. Coincidence? I think not.

What happens next?

We will plan for the 2010-11 school year based on what we know today and remain attentive and adaptable to any changes at the local, state, or federal level.

The agreement with FCEA will allow us to address the Board's highest priority: maintaining middle school electives. However, we have other great needs that are still unmet. The Governing Board would embrace the opportunity to continue discussions with the teachers' union (FCEA) and/or CSEA, especially as we learn more about the agreements reached in other districts.

We are also tracking the progress of US Senator Harkin's "Education Jobs" bill. This bill reportedly has support in the House of Representatives, but may face a battle in the Senate. We will also need to hope that if the federal funds are approved, they come directly to local school districts and are not diverted by the state.

We also appreciate the grass roots efforts of groups such as SupportCAKids and their attempts to convince the legislature to make public education a higher priority. There is some evidence that the voices of concerned parents, students, and community members are being heard even if solutions and proposals have not been generated.

Last thoughts

These are hard times for families, communities, businesses, the state, and the nation. We must all learn to live with diminished resources, and sacrifices must be made.

However, the state's persistent and historic underfunding of public education, coupled with the state's budget woes, will deprive California's students of opportunities and services available to students in other states and nations. California's overall tax rate may be in the top ten of the nation, but our funding for public education is in the bottom five. Our children and our future deserve better.

Please make your voice heard at the local, state, and federal level.